

Oral History Program: Biographical Notes

Douglas Gordon PRICE AM (1927 -)

Civil Engineer

Birth & Family: Born 9 February 1927, Campbelltown NSW. Married Eileen in mid 1950. Children: Catherine, Jeffery, Roseanne, Lesley.

Education: Completed Sydney Boys' High School, 1943.

Qualifications: BE (Civil) University of Sydney 1950.

Memberships: Honorary Fellow, Institution of Engineers, Australia; Fellow, Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering; Fellow, American Society of Civil Engineers; Honorary Member and Past Chairman, Australian Professional Consultants Council.

Awards: 1984 Peter Nicol Russell Memorial Medal, presented by the Institution of Engineers, Australia
1985 Queen's Birthday Honours, Member in the General Division of the Order of Australia

Work History: First job in 1944 was as a copy boy at the Sydney Daily Telegraph. Joined the RAAF in 1945 and left at the end of that year after successfully applying for a Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scholarship (CRTS) to study engineering at Sydney University 1946-1949.

In January 1950 a stimulating visit to the University by William Hudson resulted in Price's decision to join the newly established Snowy Mountains Authority that same year.

Price's first appointment was to the Investigation & Design Division in Sydney, initially involved in the investigation of stream flow data in the Sydney area (I don't think this is correct – possibly expressed ambiguously). This was followed by a position as the Sydney Co-ordinator for the Engineering, Geology and Drilling Branch, where he helped to equip new engineering geologists for the Snowy. Price then transferred to the busy Construction Plant Branch, moving with them to Cooma in 1951. After the Branch was taken over by the Field Construction Division, Price was based at Tolbar Camp undertaking day-labour construction of, camps, access roads and diesel power stations.

In 1954 Price developed an interest in Contract Supervision. Later that year, when he began ten months in-service training with the United States Bureau of Reclamation (USBR), his training program was designed to assist him to enter this field, working in the laboratories estimating and programming for construction supervision and also in the field on other major USBR projects.

Price also had the opportunity to work on supervision of foundation work and pressure grouting work on the Monticello Dam in California, a sister dam of Tumut Pond, both having been designed by USBR. He realised that this opportunity would accelerate his experience and confidence,

particularly if he went on to do that same type of work in Australia. This he did, working on the Tumut Pond Dam and adjacent tunnel work.

From 1955-1958 Price was Field Engineer, then Resident Engineer on supervision of the contracts for the construction of Tumut Pond Dam, Tumut 1 Pressure Tunnel and appurtenant works. He regarded Tumut Pond Dam as a favourite project, an example of excellent work and co-operation between designers, contractors and the SMA. A thin arch concrete dam, it was an unusual design in Australia and venturesome for its time.

Price experienced a very rewarding moment in his career during a visit by Sir William Hudson, as they observed the dam being filled for the first time: Sir William, regarded by Price as an expert in dam construction and a person for whom he had the highest admiration and respect, had descended to the gallery system within the dam from which it could be traversed. From this point the water could be seen flowing into the dam, with very little being taken out by the drainage system. On observing this, Sir William commented, "Mr Price, this is the driest dam that I have ever seen in my career".

In 1958 Price became Assistant Resident Engineer on supervision of contracts for the construction of Tooma Dam, Tooma -Tumut Tunnel and appurtenant works.

In 1960 Price began working in Cooma for the Planning & Estimates Division under Gus Demmler, learning construction, programming and estimating, as well as providing independent assessments and settling disputes; he was also involved in the arbitration case concerning Murray 2 Power Station Excavation and Khancoban Dam contract. *(This is ambiguous - was he also involved in arbitration for Khancoban or merely in the supervision of the Khancoban contract?)*

Price became Resident Engineer after Demmler's death and was responsible for all construction planning and estimating for major works of the Snowy Scheme, as well as works for other organisations. In 1966, he represented Australia in Cambodia when the final Pre-Construction Report for the Prek Thnot Project was prepared by a multinational team under the auspices of the Mekong Committee.

From 1967-1970 Price was Assistant to the Commissioner, and responsible directly to the Commissioner of the Authority for many top-level special engineering and managerial assignments, including a feasibility study of the Chisapani High Dam project in Nepal for the United Nations.

Before his appointment as Director (Chief Executive) in 1975, Price was one of the two Assistant Directors of SMEC, responsible for the overall direction of consulting services for numerous projects within Australia and overseas. He participated in overseas Survey Missions in 1970 and 1972, as well as the Federal Government Construction Industry Trade Mission to ASEAN countries in 1984.

Price undertook numerous overseas assignments to fulfil overall responsibility and give direction as required for projects being carried out by SMEC. The first project, Khao Laem Hydro electric project in Thailand, was a favourite and the most difficult carried out anywhere.

Price was appointed Managing Director (Chief Executive) in November 1985. He later took up various consultancy assignments as well as being Chairman of the Review Panel for Sydney Water Board Ocean Outfalls Project and Project Co-ordinator for the Prek Thnot Project in Cambodia. At the time of interview, Price was Managing Partner of DG

& EF Price Consulting Services in Cooma, a Director of Engineers Australia Pty Ltd, and a Consultant to ACTEW (in full – Australian Capital Territory Electricity and Water) Corporation Ltd.

Prepared by Jill Willis, August 2003 from oral history interview conducted by Matthew Higgins on 10.3.1999.